



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the December 2004 Azerbaijani Municipal Elections

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 19, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States commends the Azerbaijani Central Election Commission on its decision to fire election officials in nine constituency election commissions for inappropriate election conduct during the municipal elections.

We further highlight and praise, Mr. Chairman, the Central Election Commission's decision to refer ninety-five cases of election fraud to the Prosecutor General's office for further action.

The United States urges the Government of Azerbaijan to respond to the CEC's actions by bringing those individuals, who international observers witnessed committing blatant election fraud, to justice under the framework of OSCE principles and guidelines.

In general, we were disappointed in the conduct of Azerbaijani municipal elections, which were held on December 17, 2004 and observed by nearly 40 teams from several international organizations including the U.S. Embassy in Baku.

As noted in the December 18th press statement issued by the U.S. Embassy in Baku, the United States is deeply concerned over reports of inappropriate conduct by both election officials and more importantly, local executive authorities.

Observers witnessed instances of election fraud and ballot stuffing. Also disconcerting are reports of interference and meddling by local executive authorities in the independent and legal performance of local election officials in their respective regions.

Additionally, our delegation is concerned that municipal candidates and parties were not allowed to freely assemble and meet with supporters and voters during the campaign period.

We strongly urge the Government of Azerbaijan to take the necessary steps and precautions to prevent similar election violations during the upcoming November 2005 parliamentary elections. We also urge Azerbaijan's Parliament to enhance transparency by eliminating the legislative provision prohibiting election monitoring by domestic nonpartisan NGOs that receive foreign assistance.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.